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AUTHOR Beutler, Suzanne A.
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ABSTRACT

This paper attempts to show a one-to-one relationship between the various activities involved in dramatic interpretation and specific language arts skills: reading, writing, speaking, and listening. The skills listed in this model reflect both the cognitive and the affective domains and include concentration, perception, factual recall, classification, summary, translation, application, analysis, synthesis, evaluation, enjoyment of literature, group problem solving, confidence, and empathy. A brief description is provided of the specific correspondences between language arts experiences and dramatic activities which concern these skills. (KS)

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Suzanne A. Beutler

PRACTICING LANGUAGE ARTS SKILLS USING DRAMA

The literature is proliferated with articles on methodology of drama in the elementary school classroom. These articles do give teachers ideas on content and ways of using it. For many years I have enjoyed using creative dramatics in my classroom. I'm convinced that these activities are important for social, emotional and intellectual growth of the students.

The task I have set out to do is to show a one-to-one correspondence of dramatic activities with language arts skills-reading, writing, speaking and listening. The model I have devised shows a selection of skills which are used in drama and language arts. The skills included are by no means definitive. The examples illustrate instances where each skill is used in drama and language arts. Many other examples could be used, as this model is intended to be a working model for classifying other skills and examples. It is assumed that practice in these skills will enhance either drama or language arts abilities.

The skills as listed in the model fall into two categories-cognitive and affective. Again, these categories are arbitrary. Motor skills were not included as a separate group, but are implicit in the cognitive and affective domains.

Furthermore, the skills are not intended to represent a hierarchy of ability or complexity. Bloom's (1) taxonomy is apparent in the list of skills, and was used as a convenient classification of cognitive skills, but the model is not dependent on these concepts. A brief explanation of the examples used will hopefully clarify items.

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SKILLS MODEL FOR DRAMA AND LANGUAGE ARTS

	EXAMPLES FROM DRAMA	SKILL	EXAMPLES FROM LANGUAGE ARTS
COGNITIVE	Sustained dialogue	Concentration	Quantity of reading
	Blocking	Perception	Spatial Discrimination
	Sequence of action	Factual recall	Sequence of events
	Development of role	Classification	Character traits
	Essence of the plot	Summary	Comprehension of story
	Individual expression	Translation	Retell in own words
	Portray a character	Application	Use information
	A play into scenes	Analysis	Cause and effect
	Original ideas	Synthesis	Creative writing
	Production success	Evaluation	Approximation to model
AFFECTIVE	Participate in plays	Enjoyment of Literature	Choose stories
	Casting	Group problem-solving	Group story
	Build a character	Confidence	Report to class
	Identify with role	Empathy	Share feelings

Concentration

Focus needs to be maintained in any scene of a play whether it is a creative spontaneous production or a formal play with a script. With practice, students will improve on the quantity of their dialogue starting at maybe two minutes and and increasing the time to ten minutes or more. This same ability can be transfered to paying attention to a story one is reading for increasingly longer periods of time.

Perception

When a drama is being blocked, the actors decide where they will be placed in a given area on the stage, and the location of all their motions in juxtaposition to other people and objects. Visual measurement and psycho-motor control is needed. The same skills are required in writing. Decisions need to be made about where to put things in space on a page or report, and how to lay out a page of writing including illustrations.

Factual recall

Sequence of events is important to acting in that the actor must remember what comes next. Likewise, recalling the events in a story is essential in analysing plot development.

Classification

In developing a particular character, the actor must sort out what kinds of movements are appropriate and which are not. For example, if one is playing an old woman, only certain movements will convince the audience that she is old. In a

story, differentiating the various characters by classifying traits for each one is necessary for understanding character motivation.

Summary

Knowing the essence of the plot in creative drama enables the actors to produce spontaneous dialogue and action and still have a direction of what happens next. Summarizing a story helps the reader remember what happened by focusing on the main events.

Translation

In informal role-playing actual words from a story may not be remembered, but the person can act out the same character by substituting his or her own words. In the same way, retelling a story in one's own words is a common classroom activity.

Application

Acting out a pantomime is an application of an idea to movement. Thus, a character can be portrayed from several characteristics one has in mind. Information from an Encyclopedia can be applied to a larger study of a subject.

Analysis

Arranging a creative story into scenes makes the story manageable to remember and act out. Analysing, for example, a cause and effect relationship in a novel requires the reader to break down the story into a series of events.

Synthesis

Whether one is working on an original skit or written

script, originality emerges. Ideas are put together that make an action unique. Creative writing allows the same kind of process.

Evaluation

Audience response is one dimension of the success of a production. But the success of a play can often be judged by the amount of fun it was in the process of making the sets and learning how to produce the play. A writer can evaluate an assignment by how close it approximates the requirements that were given or the models that were shown.

Enjoyment of Literature

Students who like being in creative plays based on well-known folktales are participating in the enjoyment of Literature. Often, the students want to read more stories like the ones they have acted out, and when given the opportunity, they select them on their own.

Group problem-solving

Casting can often create problems among a group of students who may want the same roles. How they solve the problem of selecting the right person for a given part affects their feelings toward the group. Writing an experience story as a class includes solving differences of opinions and preserving self-respect for everyone.

Confidence

Working on a characterization in a play requires

confidence of one's own convictions or insight. Reporting to a class demands the same traits.

Empathy

In order to portray a character, one must experience how that person might feel, think or act. Stanislavsky (2) believed that an actor must pretend to live the life of the character in ways that transcend the play. A common experience in reading is to identify with the characters or wish you were there, and then imagine what you would do.

In conclusion, it is my hope that through this delineation of skills found jointly in drama and language arts, I can encourage teachers to use drama in their classrooms. I feel that drama can always be justified in any Language Arts Program, not as a peripheral bit of amusement or for school systems with extra funds for "the arts", but for practice in reading, writing, speaking and listening skills.

I attribute many of my insights into drama to the Ann Arbor Civic Theater where I have been active for ten years in set design, props, assisting stage managers, and acting. While working in these capacities, I began to see the transference of these skills to the language arts skills I was teaching in my elementary school classrooms.

References

1. Bloom, Benjamin, Taxonomy of Educational Objectives, David Mckay Co., Inc., New York, New York, 1956.

2. Stanislavsky, Konstantin, An Actor Prepares, Theater Arts Books, New York, New York, 1948.